



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 18, 2004

Ms. Jennifer Soldano
Associate General Counsel
Texas Department of Transportation
125 East 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR2004-1199

Dear Ms. Soldano:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 196377.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the "department") received two requests for the interview questions and answers provided for a specified job posting. One of the requestors also seeks copies of any notes taken during the interview process for all the applicants and all the applications submitted for this position. You claim that some of the requested interview questions and answers are excepted from required disclosure pursuant to section 552.122 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the department has not submitted the requested job applications and some of the questions and their respective preferred and actual answers, nor have you indicated that the department seeks to withhold any such information. We therefore presume that the department has already provided the requestors with this information, to the extent that it existed on the date of the department's receipt of these requests. If not, the department must do so at this time. *See Gov't Code §§ 552.006, .301, .302; see also Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (noting that if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible under circumstances).*

We will now address your arguments with respect to the submitted information. Section 552.122(b) excepts from disclosure test items developed by a licensing agency or governmental body. *See Gov't Code § 552.122(b).* In Open Records Decision No. 626

(1994), this office determined that the term “test item” in section 552.122 includes any standard means by which an individual’s or group’s knowledge or ability in a particular area is evaluated, but does not encompass evaluations of an employee’s overall job performance or suitability. Whether information falls within the section 552.122 exception must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *See* Open Records Decision No. 626 at 6 (1994). Traditionally, this office has applied section 552.122 where release of “test items” might compromise the effectiveness of future examinations. *See id.* at 4-5; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 118 (1976). Additionally, when answers to test questions might reveal the substance of the questions themselves, the answers may be withheld from disclosure under section 552.122(b). *See* Open Records Decision No. 626 at 8 (1994).

After reviewing the submitted information, we conclude that questions 2 - 7, 9, 10, and 15 test an individual’s knowledge in a particular area and thus constitute “test items” as contemplated by section 552.122(b). Accordingly, the department may withhold interview questions 2 - 7, 9, 10, and 15 and the corresponding preferred and actual responses, pursuant to section 552.122(b) of the Government Code. We find, however, that questions 13, 14, 17, and 18 are not test items for purposes of section 552.122. Thus, the department may not withhold these questions or the corresponding preferred and actual responses to these questions pursuant to section 552.122. Therefore, questions 13, 14, 17, and 18, and their corresponding preferred and actual responses must be released to the requestors.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor

should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Debbie K. Lee
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DKL/sdk

Ref: ID# 196377

Enc. Submitted documents

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